

# History of the Chicago Mardi Gras Association 1890

*Rheinischer Verein history compiled and written in German by Erika Brockerhoff in 2001 Program Book. English translation by Doerthe Erdbeer 2011.*

Like all countrymen associations of ancestral traditions dialects and customs have sprung. It was for the local Rheinlaender at places, here in the adoptive fatherland, where other living conditions and language prevailed determined to join together and form an association for them.

The Rheinlaender, known as a light, fun-loving folk, which with a good drink is pleased to merriment, singing and joking, maintain like old times, old or young, without class distinction their love for Mardi Gras. Once a year they shook off all the worries and devoted themselves to casual fidelities.

So the Rheinlaender of Chicago didn't want to miss this joy and held their first carnival session in 1882 at the Zoern's Halle, 52 Blue Island Ave. However all beginnings are difficult and until the year 1885, except for a few meetings, nothing special was done. Later a group of people from Cologne and a few Rheinlaender met under the leadership of a person named Heck. They founded the society "The Elf Koelsche Jungfern" and held a Narrensitzung every Sunday from New Years until Fastnacht 1886 at the Halle, 45 Clark Street, ending with a Masquerade Ball at the Uhlich's Halle.

Under the name "Alaaf Koeln" activities were held during the winter months at the Brandls Halle, 10 Randolph Street. But the society consisted of various elements. The Rheinlaender didn't give up hope and wanted to found a club which, expect for carnival festivities, would also be a "Unterstuetzungsverein" (aid society).

Followed by an invitation, several Rheinlaender met November 1890 to discuss the founding of a Rheinische Club at the John Kehlers Halle, 380 Larrabee Street. The attendees were: Peter Hamacher, Hubert Hamacher, Jean Trier, Heinrich Trier, Konrad Trier, Fritz Eller, Carl Kindler, John Dorn, Matthias Mohnen and Bernard Buschfeld.

John Dorn was elected temporary chairman and Matthias Mohnen was elected temporary secretary.

It was decided to found a Rheinische Verein, which would first support each other, help with affairs in word and deed as well as help newly immigrated fellow countrymen. Furthermore it was decided the initiation fee was 25 cents.

Secondly, the club shall ensure the humor during the carnival season with carnival festivities. After a heated debate, the club assumed the name "Rheinische Unterstuetzungsverein". After approximately 40 men signed up as members, they voted Jean Trier as the First President.

On Monday, December 14th, 1890, the first Narrensitzung was held. After 12 hours, a torchlight procession followed with a lot of cheering down North Avenue. That's how the first Narrensitzung ended in the early morning hours.

On January 4th, 1891, the first general meeting was held at which time 85 men had signed up as members. In the general meeting the statues were deliberated, established and released for printing. Also, a board of directors was formed.

In August, 1891, the first picnic was held at Hoerdt's Grove on Belmont Avenue, which despite strong rain, was a success.

Club members donated the first banner which was ceremonially uncovered at the first anniversary party under the participation of the following choruses: Arion Maennerchor, Harugari Liedertafel, Liedertael Vorwaerts and Rothmaenner Liederkrantz.



*Consegration of the flag 6-4-95  
Donors of the flag Helen & Walter Klink*

During the carnival session 1891/1892, eight Narrensitzungen were held commencing New Year's Eve and every Sunday thereafter, through February 21st, ending with a masquerade ball on February 28th. The price of \$1 included admission to all eight events for the whole family plus admission for one family member for the ball.

However, inspired by the quick success and enthusiasm some member became too bold. They suggested the famous son of Carl Schurz should become an honorary member. Furthermore, they planed a club house on North Avenue and formed a World Exhibit committee. The purpose was to house Rheinlaender, who came to Chicago for the Exhibit and be helpful in other ways. The idea failed because of financial reasons.

On July 24th, 1892, the second Picnic was held at the Hoerd't's Grove. Before the picnic a big parade stepped off with participation of several other clubs. The parade had floats which represented the Father Rhein, the Lorelei, music, art and singing, the Cologne farmer and virgin, students from Bonn etc. Every member took part in this event whether on a float, on a wagon or on a horse.

Love for the cause wasn't enough. Necessary support and enjoyment was needed. The Rheinische Verein had to survive a storm and stress period. A dry spell followed and several members left.

The old guard stuck together and made it through the storm. They celebrated like the old days. In the year 1893 a carnival newspaper by the name of "Ulk" was published. The social crisis after the World Exhibit was over and the club bloomed again.

Since 1896 the club enrolled active as well as passive members, which was worthwhile. For the annual carnival festivities the club elected next to club officials a special committee, or Elfer-Rath. This Elfer-Rath has always been a favorite sight at the Narrensitzungen. So it is without question that only the best members of the Rheinische Verein could be part of this. They understood how to bring the wonderful costumes and traditions from the native country to the new home land.



*Elfer-Rath Mitglied  
Bernard Klink - 1912*

In the early 1900 the club had just recovered from a difficult period. Plans were then made for a huge parade in 1902. A carnivals newspaper was published. The organization and leadership of the parade of November 8th, 1902, was under the direction of John Cremer. Besides the Rheinische Unterstuetzungsverein the following clubs joined the parade: Trierscher Bruderbund, Gesellschaft Ulk, Frauenverein Viktoria, Frauenverein Minerva, Lily of the West, Knights and Ladies of honor, Pocahontas Frauenverein, Pfaelzer Verein, Liedertafel Vorwaerts, Verein der Brandenburger, Katzenberger Damenchor, Garfield Frauenverein, Wilder Maennerchor, Trierscher Unterstuetzungsverein, Einigkeit Council, Schuetzenverein and Frosch Club.

Many business men supported the cause. A lot of Chicagoan's participated in the parade, which existed like a carnivals parade in Cologne on the Rhine. There were bands in costumes, gorgeous show cars, Funken-Artillerie etc. It ended with a masquerade ball at the Northside Turnhalle on Clark Street. The event was attended by the then mayor Carter H. Harrison and other dignitaries. The reigning prinz was Dr. F. W. Scheuerman. This function was the biggest event for the Rheinische Verein so far. However, due to the enormous expenses and organization this event wasn't repeated.

Mr. Cremer has demonstrated what could be accomplished through hard work and organization and gained confidence of the members. He was then elected president in 1905 and held the office for 31 years.

In the year 1915, the year of the silver jubilee, a choral group was formed. In order to draw more members and guest to the functions, it was decided that the language at these events should be strictly German.



*Rheinischer Verein  
Silbernes Jubilaeum*

As mentioned earlier the Rheinische Verein was also an aid society. Thus, \$5.00 a week in sick pay was paid to members for a period of 26 weeks of illness. Families of deceased members were paid \$150 to help defray funeral expenses. From 1890 to 1915, \$15,000 was distributed as sick pay and \$7,500 in funeral expenses. Also \$675 was issued to the German-Austrian-Hungarian Aid Society. German war bonds were purchased for \$4,500 and still the club had a considerable bank account left.

Any male between the age of 18 and 50 could become a member, but he had to be born in the Rhineland or his parents had to be from the region.

The years of the great depression left its trails in the Rheinische Verein von Chicago 1890 (how the club was called by then). The membership became smaller and the financial responsibilities toward the meanwhile famous Gesangsverein were too big. In 1933 the Rheinische Gesangsverein left the club and formed their own organization which to this day still exists.

In 1936 the woman got organized and since then meet once a month.

A Golden anniversary was held on September 28th, 1940, at the Germania Club under the reign of S.T. Prinz Paul I (Paul Clemens) and I. L. Prinzessin Annie I.

*50th Anniversary Prinz  
Paul Clemens*



In spite of difficulties during World War II, meeting and festivities and a masquerade ball were held. The president Harry Claes was confronted with hard times. However, thanks to him a committee was appointed and an "American relief for Germany" was formed.

In the 1950's many new immigrants came from Germany and the bylaws were once more changed so not only Rheinlaender, but everybody who was born in Germany could join the club. Max Kreiner, who was a long time friend of the club, was such a member. His wife Kaethe Kreiner was the first Funkenmarienchen. In 1952 the Amazonen Corps was founded by Anniemarie Marx. In 1956/57 Karl-Heinz Brockerhoff founded the Fanfaren Corps with co-founder Gustav Hopp (Fanfaren), Herbert Austen and Fritz Mueller (both Fanfaren). The first drummers were Emil DeHoff and Goetz Nickel. These two groups are indispensable to the Rheinische Verein.

*Der Original-Stamm des Fanfaren Corps 1957*

*Drums: Goetz Nickel, Emil DeHoff*

*Fanfaren: Herbert Austen, Gustav Hopp,  
Karl-Heinz Brockerhoff*

*Missing: Fritz Mueller*



In 1964 the club chartered a plane for a trip to Germany. The acting president Karl Laschet organized a bus and boat trip through the country. Every evening the RV met with a different carnival club in the city they visited.

The diamond anniversary followed. Karl-Heinz Brockerhoff was elected prince of the season 1964/65. It was then that Karl -Heinz founded the position of Hofmarshall (aid to the prince) and Adjutant (escort of the princess). Karl-Heinz reigned under the name S.T. Prinz Heinrich I and his Prinzessin was I.L. Erika I. The acting president said: "no fear of size" and chose the Aragon Ballroom for the masquerade ball. It was the biggest event the club ever had with 4006 guests.



*75th Anniversary Prinzenpaar  
Karl-Heinz & Erika Brockerhoff*

The same year the Rheinische Verein helped found the Rheinische Verein Gruen-Weiss Milwaukee.

In 1969/70 the clubhouse on Elston Avenue was acquired with the help of the members who made loans to the club at a rate of \$100 per certificate. It was paid back when the mortgage was paid off and all the miscellaneous expenses were paid. Many members however donated their contribution to the club. In the first carnival session in the own home Anneliese Jenkins, president of the ladies group, started the Weiberfastnacht, which is still a popular event.

In May 1980 elections were held and women could become members. The first female members were Erika Brockerhoff, Rosemarie Scheel, Karla Schmidt and Linda Schmidt. In 1981 the Prinzengarde was found. After two funny skids by the Elfer-Rath in 1985 and 1986 Klaus Stoepler had the idea to start a "Herrenballett".



*Picture Elfer-Rath 1986*

The 100th anniversary was celebrated under the presidency of Erich Himmel at Stevens Ballroom in Rosemont in 1990. The anniversary couple was S.T. Johannes and I.L. Prinzessin Erika II. The Junior Amazonen, which was founded by Erika Erdbeer the same year, had their first performance

at the ball. The first members were Dawn Boys, Nikki Kubica, Andrea Gunther, Karina Hopp, Tracy Lemke and Kristi Marx.

***100th Anniversary Prinzenpaar  
Johannes & Erika Meisen***



In 1999 the Rheinische Verein had the honor to provide S.T. Prinz Heinrich I and I.L. Prinzessin Erika I as the USA Prinzenpaar elected by the GAMGA. Approximately 250 members and friends traveled to Las Vegas for the crowning including Fanfaren Corps, Amazonen Corps, Prinzengarde, Hofmarshall GuentherPiekny and Adjutant Guenther Berck.



***USA Prinzenpaar 1999  
Karl-Heinz & Erika Brockerhoff  
Elected by the Umbrella Organization  
G.A.M.G.A. and crowned in Las Vegas***

Times changed and a great deal of young people was interested in the Rheinische Verein. The bylaws were changed again. Members didn't have to be of German decent anymore, but they have to follow the traditions of the German carnival. The festivities and events were now held in English instead of German.

The millennium followed with the 111th Anniversary of the club. Under the presidency of Joseph Matuschka the club experienced a boom. At the anniversary masquerade ball were a lot of young people. The 111th anniversary couple was S.T. Prinz Cornel I and I.L. Prinzessin Sonia I were a successful couple. The Prinz like the Hofmarshall Emil Wehrle and Adjutant Paul Mueller are members of the Fanfaren Corps. The first event in the new millennium was celebrated at the Stevens Ballroom in Rosemont.

In 2011 the Rheinischer Verein has reached another milestone 121 years, the product of 11 X 11. Therefore it is fitting to celebrate and reflect on these 10 years since our last big event the 111th Anniversary, which was celebrated in 2001.

Much has happened since then, Helmut Mueller became president in 2002 relieving Josef Matuschka who became our Ehrenpresident, joining Erich Himmel in that exalted position. Our Prinzenpaar that year was S.T. Prinz William III. and I.L. Prinzessin Elizabeth II.

In 2003 under Helmut's leadership and under the reign of Prinz Wilfred I. and I.L. Prinzessin Wilma, with 150 members, the R.V. traveled across the pond to Lörzweiler, Germany to participate in the Rosenmontag parade in Mainz. In 2004, Bill Keim happily repeated his reign as S.T. William III. and his wife Elizabeth joined him for another wonderful year.



S.T. Prinz William III.  
I.L. Prinzessin Elizabeth II.  
President Reinhard

During his second term as Prinz, the Rheinischer Verein was invited by Mayor Daley to the opening of Millennium Park. The Fanfaren Corps, under the direction of Reiner Mayer, led the way for the ethnic parade celebrating the multicultural fabric of this city as this long awaited gem of Chicago finally was opened to the public. A new president was also elected that year. Helmut Mueller handed the reigns over to Reinhard Richter, a long time member of the Rheinischer Gesang Verein, who has led the Verein since then.

Reinhard and his wife Ilse became our Prinzenpaar for 2005. With the support of a strong and able Vorstand, the year came off as a success despite the dual duties of the president and Prinz. During this time we entered the digital / modern age, bringing our website to life, [www.mardigraschicago.com](http://www.mardigraschicago.com), where our past ten years are thoroughly documented including some historical photographs of many years ago.



In 2006 our Fanfaren Corps participated in the Oktoberfest parade in Munich as the first ever non European marching band to ever be invited to this world renowned event.

Gisela Jüngling retired as leader of the Amazonen, concentrating on her own young family, and handing over the reigns to Anita Krestel and Christine Fazekas.



Matt and Joe

Our honorary president Joe Matuschka started the Mayfest at Lincoln Square in 1999 and by 2009 it was voted "Best Fest In Chicago" by the Chicago Tribune Red Eye. During this period, the Rheinischer Verein received their 501(c)3 not-for-profit charitable status. They have worked side-by-side with their partners, the St. Hubertus Jagd Verein, since the very first Maifest. The Maifest has allowed us to complete major renovations to our clubhouse. We have also been able to provide more support for our performing groups, the Fanfarencorp and the Amazonencorps, allowing us to showcase them from Las Vegas to Cincinnati, and from Munich to Mainz.

Our Rosenmontag is frequented by many of our friends from Minnesota, Kansas City, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Cincinnati and this year even from Edmonton Canada. We are proud to be able to maintain this yearly tradition. The Rheinischer Verein is the only Karneval organization in the United States who still celebrates Rosenmontag traditionally as the last event of the "Fünfte Saison" (Fifth Season)

During the past couple of years we unexpectedly lost four icons of Karneval, Wally Klink, our beloved "Mother Superior", Erika Brockerhof, and Bill and Anneliese Jenkins. We will always keep them fondly in our hearts and memories and true to their guiding light.



In the last few years, the Rheinischer Verein has gone through many positive changes. We retired our old prinzenfloat and now have a new state of the art float, to be used for many more seasons to come. Our Prinzengarde and Elferat, have gone through transformations by adding many new members and updating to new and more modern uniforms, bringing Rheinischer Verein Karneval into the 21st century. They continue to be actively involved in every facet of our organization.

Our Prinz for our 11 X 11 Anniversary year is none other than our Polizist of three decades, now addressed as S.T. Prinz Manfred II. and I.L. Prinzessin Jennifer I.

This year being a long season, enabled us to travel to Lörzweiler and Mainz again, renewing old friendships and strengthening our resolve to maintain traditions and customs, come what may. Preparations are underway for the Rheinischer Verein's 122nd Karneval Season. We hope you will be able to join us as we continue the traditions of German Karneval in Chicago.

We would like to thank all of our friends and supporters who have made this journey possible! As the Beatles said it so aptly, "I get by with a little help from my friends".